



SECULAR TREND OF MUSLIM EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Muslims are lagging behind the Hindus in their educational achievement in India. Their educational backwardness is commonly attributed to the 'religious fanaticism' or sometimes to the 'minority complex'. This conception became more forceful in the backdrop of hundreds of Madrasahs being established during the mid-1970s particularly across the northern part of India. Though there was historical cause behind reluctance among the Muslims toward modern education that was initiated by the British in India, some scholars highlighted various socio-economic shortcomings behind such backwardness. Dealing with a Muslim and a Hindu group living in the same village of West Bengal in India, we have tried to examine empirically whether religious identity affects educational performance of the Muslims compared to the Hindus and, if not, to find out the root cause of their educational under-achievement. The study shows that religious or minority identity does not have any bearing upon the educational backwardness of the Muslims under study. It further shows that poor economic condition of the Muslims, coupled with larger family size and early marriage of children, is behind the high rate of drop outs resulting in their educational backwardness. Settled within the same socio-economic context and having apparently similar access to the infra-structural facilities in educational institute in and around the study area, the Muslim group is lagging behind their Hindu neighbourhood in educational achievement mainly because of their poor economy. There is no religious inclination towards education is traced. Rather, the study reveals a secular trend of education among the Muslims.

KEYWORDS: Literacy, Muslim education, measure of youngness, drop-out.

1. INTRODUCTION:

There is a commonly held notion that the Muslims are lagging behind the Hindus in educational achievement in India. This is a much generalized statement since the Muslims have social stratification like the Hindus and it is the lower and lower-middle class Muslim groups who are really facing backwardness as observed by Desai (1981: 1923). There is also a perception that the Muslims are educationally lagging because of their inclination toward religious education in Islamic institution. Their backwardness is commonly attributed to the 'religious fanaticism' or sometimes to the 'minority complex'. The conception became more forceful in view of hundreds of Madrasahs being established particularly across northern India during the mid-1970s. However, this was not, as Engineer argues, because of the Muslims' growing interest in religious education in Madrasahs, but as a historical consequence of 'oil revolution' in the Arab world during the early 1970s and of the opposing attitude of the 'Ulemas' in particular against the imperialist education system of the British especially during the era of India's freedom struggle (Engineer, 2001: 3221). Begum Rokeya (1999) also points out that Muslims have neglected modern education, which was initiated actually by the British, due to their strong anti-British feeling and traditional conservatism. The issue of educational backwardness of the Muslims in India has been crucial concern for a few scholars (Mondal, 1989; Peer, 1991; Dwarakanath, 2002; Hossain, 2012; Udin, 2012; Hoque, 2016). These studies basically highlight various socio-economic shortcomings the Indian Muslims facing with in connection with their educational achievement. According to the Sacher Committee (2006), lack of sufficient number of schools and infrastructural facilities in the Muslim dominated areas is the vital cause of educational backwardness of Muslims in India. On the contrary, Ansari (1992) observes that religious orthodoxy and cultural ethos of the Muslims are leading to the belief that modern education is a threat to the Islamic value. In an interesting study on Muslim education in undivided Bengal during 1637-1837, Syed Murtaza Ali finds an antipathic attitude towards learning English among the Muslims (Ali, 1971).

With this background, we are trying in the present study to empirically identify the root cause of educational backwardness of the Muslims with special refer-

ence to a Muslim group living within a bi-ethnic context in Panapukur village under Bhangar block of South 24-parganas in West Bengal. The other group is the Hindus. Both the religious groups are living within the same socio-ecological setting with the same educational facility. There are only one Government aided primary school (*viz.*, Panapukur Free Primary School) and one *etimkhana* (i.e., an Islamic institution for orphans) under private ownership in the village under study. In addition to these, there are seven Government aided high schools and high madrasahs, one Government aided college, one *kharezi* madrasah and one *hafezi* madrasah in the surrounding villages. These institutions are also accessible to the students of the village under study. All these institutions are within 1 to 2.5 km from the study area. Both the religious groups have been treated here as ethnic groups in Barthian sense (Barth, 1969; Smith, 1986).

2. METHODOLOGY:

This study is basically empirical in nature. Dealing from a comparative framework, it tries to analyse some demographic aspects of both the Muslim and Hindu groups settled in Panapukur village of South 24-parganas in West Bengal. Taking into consideration various information that can depict the dimensions of educational achievement and/or under-achievement of both the religious groups, it strives to examine whether religious values do play any role in educational performance and, if not, to identify the root cause(s) of educational backwardness of the Muslims in comparison to their neighbouring Hindus living in the same village. Some case studies have also been used to substantiate the identity orientation and cultural values associated with the domain of education amongst the community members involved.

Since the village community is very large and it is hardly possible to study within a brief span of time and without any funding, only 30 per cent families from both the Muslim and Hindu communities have been selected. Population of both the ethnic groups are distributed over a number of *paras* (hamlets) based mainly on caste identity. Therefore, stratified random sampling method has been employed to select the representative families from each and every *para* for the study. The sampled families thus selected comprise the study group of 184 families (including 93 Muslim and 91 Hindu families) and 770 persons (Tables 1).

Table 1: Distribution of families by *para* (hamlet) at Panapukur and selection of the study group.

Religious group	Para (hamlet)	Number of families	Study group			
			30 % families selected	Male	Female	Total
			N	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
MUSLIM	Athi para	68	25	64 (08.31)	62 (08.05)	126 (16.36)
	Baidya para	22	06	9 (01.17)	16 (02.08)	25 (03.25)
	Mir Para	21	10	24 (03.12)	25 (03.25)	49 (06.36)
	Molla Para	110	29	69 (08.96)	59 (07.66)	128 (16.62)
	Mollik para	36	08	18 (02.34)	15 (01.95)	33 (04.29)
	Sekh Para	54	15	30 (03.90)	31 (04.03)	61 (07.92)
	Total	311	93	214 (27.79)	208 (27.01)	422 (54.81)

Religious group	Para (hamlet)	Number of families	Study group			
			30 % families selected	Male	Female	Total
			N	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
HINDU	Ghosh Para	58	17	34 (04.42)	35 (04.55)	69 (08.96)
	Karmakar Para	90	27	56 (07.27)	56 (07.27)	112 (14.55)
	Sarnakar Para	14	05	7 (00.91)	10 (01.30)	17 (02.21)
	School Para	142	42	78 (10.13)	72 (09.35)	150 (19.48)
	Total	304	91	175 (22.73)	173 (22.47)	348 (45.19)
All groups	All paras	615	184	389 (50.52)	381 (49.48)	770 (100.0)

Source: Fieldwork data, 2014

For the present purpose, the reported religion of the head of the household was considered as the religion of all members of the household. A person is considered literate when she/he can both read and write a simple document with understanding in at least one language. For all the individuals who were found to be literate, the general level of education was collected in terms of the highest level of education successfully completed by him/her. Particulars of current attendance in educational institution were noted as reported by the persons aged 5-24 years, since persons within this age cohort are expected to continue their formal education.

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:

Let us first find the literacy status of the Muslims in India. The Indian Muslims show the lowest literacy rate (57.28 %) as per the Census report, 2011. They are found to lag behind the district, state and the national figures in this regard (Table 2). They are also found to lag behind the other major religious groups in the country (Fig.1). The Muslims in the study area show literacy rate well below those of the other area-specific figures. This is also the lowest in terms of sex-specific figures (Table 2). The draft report of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSS, 2007-08) shows that only ten out of hundred Muslims in India take up higher education (NSSO, 2010). It is the lowest amongst all religious groups. According to the 2011 Census, as low as only 2.76 percent of Muslims is educated up to graduation level or beyond. The All India Survey on Higher Education (2014-15) finds that Muslims comprise 14 percent of India's population but account for only 4.4 percent of students enrolled in higher education (Government of India, 2017).

Table 2: Literacy rate in the study area compared to the district, state and national figures among the Muslims

Country/State/ District/ study area	Literacy rate			
	Total	Male	Female	Male-female difference
India ¹	57.28	62.41	51.90	10.51
West Bengal ¹	57.18	64.61	49.75	14.86
South 24 Parganas ¹	59.83	68.84	50.27	18.57
Panapukur ² (study area)	53.08	61.21	47.12	14.09

Source: ¹Census of India 2011 and ²fieldwork data 2014.

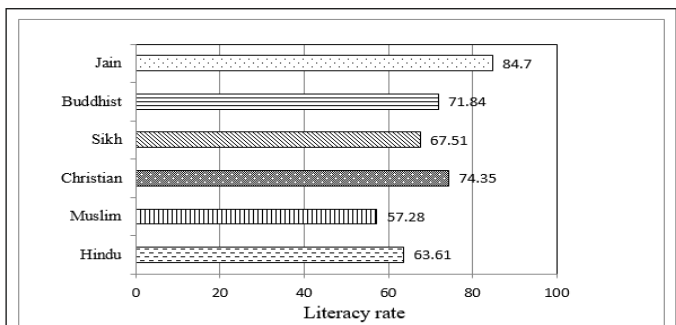


Fig. 1: Bar diagram showing literacy rate among Muslims compared to the other religious communities in India (Census of India, 2011)

The study group comprises almost equal proportion of the Muslim (50.54%) and Hindu (49.46%) families, with 422 and 348 persons belonging to the respective communities (Table 3). The mean number of family members among the Muslims is 4.54 per family, compared to that of 3.82 among the Hindus. While the Hindus have 22.83 per cent small family (comprising 1-3 members), the Muslims have such family of only 10.87 per cent among them. The latter have 33.70 and 5.98 per cent medium (with 4-6 members) and large families (with 7-9 members), whereas these are 24.46 and 2.17 per cent respectively for the Hindus. Per cent distribution of families shows that the Muslims have a greater tendency to have larger family. Larger family size may involve greater economic burden that may have adverse effect on children's enrolment and educational achievement. In the present study group, it seems to have significant association.

For the present study group, monthly family income reportedly ranges from less than INR 3000 to more than INR 18000 (Table 4). There are only 20.65 per cent families in the village that earn, on an average, INR 500 per day. Whereas only 7.60 per cent Muslim families manages to earn more than INR 15000 per month on an average, 13.05 per cent Hindu families earn such amount. It is found that the number of families steadily increases when it comes to the monthly family income range of INR 6001 to 9000 but it sharply comes down when the income range crosses INR 9000 per month among the Muslims. On the other hand, among the Hindus the income range shows a relatively growing trend (Fig. 2). Thus, it is very clear that the Hindus are economically better off, though the economic condition of the entire village community is not sound.

Table 3: Distribution of family by size and religious group in the study area

Religious group	Family type			Total
	Small family (1-3 membered)	Medium family (4-6 membered)	Large family (7-9 membered)	
Muslim	20 (10.87)	62 (33.70)	11 (5.98)	93 (50.54)
Hindu	42 (22.83)	45 (24.46)	4 (02.17)	91 (49.46)
All groups	62 (33.70)	107 (58.15)	15 (8.15)	184 (100.00)

Table 4: Distribution of family by monthly family income and religious group in the study area

Religious group	Family income (per month in INR)							Total
	<3000	3001- 6000	6001- 9000	9001-12000	12001-15000	15001-18000	>18001	
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	
Muslim	5 (2.72)	4 (2.17)	35 (19.02)	18 (9.78)	17 (9.24)	7 (3.80)	7 (3.80)	93 (50.54)
Hindu	2 (1.09)	11 (5.98)	20 (10.87)	20 (10.87)	14 (7.61)	11 (5.98)	13 (7.07)	91 (49.46)
All groups	7 (3.80)	15 (8.15)	55 (29.89)	38 (20.65)	31 (16.85)	18 (9.78)	20 (10.87)	184 (100.0)

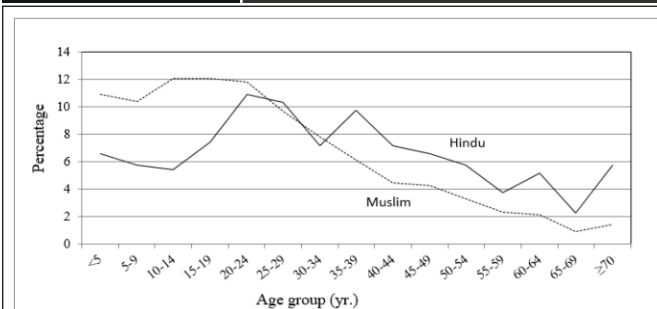


Fig. 3: Population distribution by age and religious identity.

With relatively larger family size and low family income, the Muslim families appear to be more vulnerable compared to the Hindu group. Its most decisive social consequence is early marriage of girls in particular. Distribution of persons of both sexes in accordance with their age at first marriage shows that there is high rate of early marriage among the persons of both sexes (Table 4). Among the Muslims as much as 57.20 per cent persons, including 18.46 per cent males and 38.74 per cent females, are married before attaining their permissible age for marriage. The rate of early marriage among the Hindus is also not insignificant. This is 31.22 per cent, including 6.35 per cent for males and 24.87 per cent for females. This early married population is either never enrolled or the most obvious drop-outs. Incidences of early marriage reportedly do not have any bearing upon religious orientation of the ethnic groups concerned. Early marriage is principally caused by economic instability of the people concerned. This obviously causes a great deal of drop-out risk among both the ethnic groups, though more among the Muslims.

Table 4: Distribution of males and females according to their age at 1st marriage among there ligious groups.

Age at 1 st marriage (in yrs.)	Muslim						Hindu					
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
12	0	0.00	3	1.35	3	1.35	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
13	0	0.00	17	7.66	17	7.66	0	0.00	7	3.41	7	3.41
14	1	0.45	26	11.71	27	12.16	0	0.00	4	1.95	4	1.95
15	1	0.45	16	7.21	17	7.66	1	0.49	11	5.37	12	5.85
16	3	1.35	9	4.05	12	5.41	1	0.49	17	8.29	18	8.78
17	9	4.05	15	6.76	24	10.81	2	0.98	12	5.85	14	6.83
18	7	3.15	6	2.70	13	5.86	4	1.95	19	9.27	23	11.22
19	13	5.86	6	2.70	19	8.56	2	0.98	11	5.37	13	6.34
20	7	3.15	12	5.41	19	8.56	3	1.46	13	6.34	16	7.80
21	13	5.86	1	0.45	14	6.31	4	1.95	9	4.39	13	6.34
22	10	4.50	4	1.80	14	6.31	4	1.95	5	2.44	9	4.39
23	5	2.25	0	0.00	5	2.25	2	0.98	4	1.95	6	2.93
24	7	3.15	3	1.35	10	4.50	8	3.90	10	4.88	18	8.78
25	3	1.35	1	0.45	4	1.80	10	4.88	1	0.49	11	5.37
26	7	3.15	0	0.00	7	3.15	5	2.44	1	0.49	6	2.93
27	5	2.25	1	0.45	6	2.70	6	2.93	0	0.00	6	2.93
28	3	1.35	0	0.00	3	1.35	13	6.34	1	0.49	14	6.83
29	6	2.70	0	0.00	6	2.70	4	1.95	0	0.00	4	1.95
30	3	1.35	0	0.00	1	0.45	4	1.95	1	0.49	5	2.44
31	1	0.45	0	0.00	1	0.45	6	2.93	0	0.00	6	2.93
All types	104	46.85	120	54.05	222	100.00	79	38.54	126	61.46	205	100.00

Literary status of the Muslim and Hindu groups under study shows that the Muslims outnumber the Hindus in terms of per centage of the illiterates (Table 5). The

former group have illiterates that are almost double (25.71%) than that of the latter (13.77%). This is no surprising that illiteracy rate is higher among the women in both the ethnic groups. It is found that only 0.39 per cent Muslim boys have studied in hafezi Madrasah. This number is not significant enough to establish a religious orientation in educational under-achievement among the Muslims (Tables 5, 6) This is also markedly found that the Muslim children outnumber those of the Hindus in primary and junior high stages, but they are outnumbered by the Hindu children in later stages starting from the secondary one (Table 6, Fig. 4). This suggests that frequency of enrolment in primary and junior high schools is higher for the Muslim children compared to those of the Hindus. But the Muslim children fail to carry on their studies subsequently and ultimately become drop-outs. A case study in this connection may help to identify the causal factor that led Rahim Box Molla (name changed), aged 65 years and a resident of the Molla para, to give up his institutional study. In his own words (free translation):

I can still remember my early childhood days. My father had no agricultural or homestead land. Our dwelling was on a pottijomi [vested land]. My father usually used to serve a Hindu family in our village as day labourer and sometimes to other families also. Our family was a big one including my four brothers and three sisters. My mother had to serve as a maidservant to a nearby family. She also used to visit along with my father our neighbouring villages as wage labourer during the time of harvesting paddy. I was enrolled in a primary school. But my father could not afford it. So, I left the school when I was in class III and was engaged to look after the cows and bullocks of the family my father used to serve.

However, my son studied up to class VI. I wanted him to continue his study. But he had no interest in his education and left the school. My grandson and granddaughter are now studying in class X and class XI respectively [parenthesis ours].

Another case tells of something different story. Narrative of Serina Bibi (name changed), aged 26 years, about her early days is as follows (free translation):

I had to leave my school when I was in class IV. My father could hardly afford for my study and did not like to send me to a high school located at a distant place outside our village. My parents could not assist me in my study since they were illiterates. They preferred for my marriage. I was married when I was 12 years. My husband is a mason who is also an illiterate. Now I am engaged in jori work [i.e., a kind of embroidery work on dress materials]. Our two children are now in the village primary school. I wish they would be educated, but Allah knows how far we can afford to continue their education [parenthesis ours].

Both the cases reveal that poverty is the main cause of early drop-out in school level education and letting the children into early marriage. Notwithstanding the facts, most of the literates are of the younger generations. It means children of recent generation are enrolled in school, but low income of their family is the main obstacle before continuing their studies. Interestingly, there are some Government schemes for proving educational incentives to the rural marginal people, which may help at least to some extent to the poor families to overcome the situation. The case of Mohiduddin Baidya (name changed), aged 18 years and son of a marginal farmer, suggests for new hope. His father Imdadul Baidya (name changed), aged 45 years, states about his son's education (free translation):

My son studies in class XI in the Bhangar High School that is located nearly 1.5 km away from here. He uses to go to school by a bicycle. He is a good student and studying in science stream with Mathematics, his favourite subject. I'm a poor man. How can I manage a private tutor for him? Teachers of his school are helping him in his study. One teacher of Biology in his school has been proving him financial assistance. Mohiduddin is also getting a scholarship [Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means Scholarship for Minorities] from the State Government. His scholarship amount is utilized for purchasing his books and dresses.

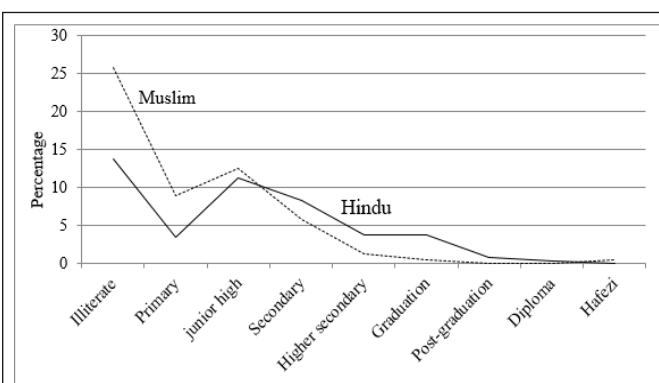
I left my school at my early age. My parent could not afford for my study. We did not get any motivation for further education at that time also. I think my son should undertake a suitable training after his higher secondary examination, which would enable him to have an earning to support us. But he aims at studying further and wants to be a school teacher [parenthesis ours].

Table 5: Percentage distribution of the Muslim and Hindu populations by educational status in the study area (n= 770)

Gender	Religious group	Illiterate	Literate								Grand Total
			Primary	Junior high	Secondary	Higher- secondary	Graduation	Post-graduation	Diploma	Hafezi	
Male	Muslim	10.78	6.88	7.14	1.95	0.39	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.39	27.79
	Hindu	5.97	1.43	6.36	3.90	2.08	2.60	0.26	0.13	0.00	22.73
Female	Muslim	14.94	2.08	5.32	3.77	0.78	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	27.01
	Hindu	7.79	1.95	4.81	4.42	1.69	1.17	0.52	0.13	0.00	22.47
Total	Muslim	25.71	8.96	12.47	5.71	1.17	0.39	0.00	0.00	0.39	54.81
	Hindu	13.77	3.38	11.17	8.31	3.77	3.77	0.78	0.26	0.00	45.19
All types		39.48	12.34	23.64	14.03	4.94	4.16	0.78	0.26	0.39	100.00

Table 6: Percentage distribution of the Muslim and Hindu population by age-specific educational status (n=770)

Age group (yrs.)	Religious Group	Illiterate	Literate									Grand Total
			Primary	Junior high	Secondary	Higher- secondary	Graduate	Post-graduation	Diploma	Hafezi	Total	
<5	Muslim	5.97	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.97
	Hindu	2.99	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.99
5-9	Muslim	2.47	2.99	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	3.25	5.71
	Hindu	1.82	0.65	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.78	2.60
10-14	Muslim	0.00	1.69	4.81	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	6.62	6.62
	Hindu	0.13	0.26	1.69	0.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.47	2.47
15-19	Muslim	0.91	0.52	1.82	2.60	0.65	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	5.71	6.62
	Hindu	0.39	0.00	0.65	0.91	1.17	0.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.25	3.38
20-24	Muslim	2.60	0.78	1.17	1.43	0.26	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.90	6.49
	Hindu	0.65	0.13	0.91	1.56	0.39	0.91	0.52	0.13	0.00	4.55	4.94
25-29	Muslim	2.34	0.91	1.30	0.65	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.99	5.32
	Hindu	0.52	0.26	1.69	1.17	0.39	0.26	0.13	0.13	0.00	4.03	4.68
30-34	Muslim	2.47	0.26	1.30	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.82	4.29
	Hindu	0.52	0.13	1.04	0.78	0.26	0.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.73	3.25
35-39	Muslim	1.56	0.26	0.91	0.39	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.82	3.38
	Hindu	1.30	0.52	1.17	0.78	0.65	0.65	0.13	0.00	0.00	3.90	4.42
40-44	Muslim	1.69	0.52	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.78	2.47
	Hindu	1.17	0.39	1.30	0.65	0.13	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.73	3.25
45-49	Muslim	1.56	0.13	0.65	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.78	2.34
	Hindu	0.65	0.52	0.39	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.69	2.99
50-54	Muslim	1.30	0.26	0.13	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.52	1.82
	Hindu	1.04	0.00	0.52	0.65	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.43	2.60
55-59	Muslim	1.04	0.13	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.26	1.30
	Hindu	0.78	0.39	0.39	0.00	0.13	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.04	1.69
60-64	Muslim	0.65	0.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.52	1.17
	Hindu	1.04	0.00	0.26	0.91	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.30	2.34
65-69	Muslim	0.39	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.52
	Hindu	0.78	0.13	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.26	1.04
≥70	Muslim	0.78	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.78
	Hindu	1.30	0.00	1.04	0.00	0.13	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.30	2.60
All age group	Muslim	25.71	8.96	0.00	0.00	1.17	0.39	0.00	0.00	0.39	29.09	54.81
	Hindu	13.77	3.38	11.17	8.31	3.77	3.77	0.78	0.26	0.00	31.43	45.19
	Total	39.48	12.34	11.17	8.31	4.94	4.16	0.78	0.26	0.39	60.52	100.00

**Fig. 4: Trends of educational progress among the Muslim and Hindu groups.**

Population aged 5-24 years in any group is supposed to continue their studies. It is found in the present case that about 63 per cent of the population aged 5-24 years are continuing their studies at present (Table 7). Of them 40.15 per cent belongs to the Muslims, while 22.78 per cent to the Hindus. Interestingly, the persons who are continuing their studies mostly fall under the lower age groups. Number of such persons sharply decreases with the higher age groups. This is very clear particularly among the Muslims. On the contrary, among the Hindus

there are considerable number of persons in the upper age groups, who are still continuing their studies. With regard to age-specific drop-out rates, the Muslims outnumber the Hindus excepting in the age group of 5-9 years. This suggests that the Muslims have the attitude to enrol their children in primary school. But with the increasing age of the children the drop-out rate among them increases, compared to those among the Hindus.

If we look into the causes of drop-out, the most prominent cause is poverty (Table 8). Poverty has made 45.07 per cent drop-outs among the Muslims, while such drop-outs are 32.0 per cent among the Hindu children. The second-most prominent cause appears to be engaged as daily wage labourer or temporary worker. So, a considerable section of children are forced to give up their institutional education and ultimately become labourers. The third prominent cause is early marriage of girls in particular. Such drop-outs are 13.31 per cent among the Muslims and 12 per cent among the Hindus. Children having no interest in formal education is not however insignificant. This amounts to 12.68 per cent and 20 per cent among the Muslim and Hindu groups respectively. Thus, religious value of the either community does not apparently contribute towards drop-out.

This is obvious from the above findings that poverty becomes the most impactful factor that makes a difference in educational achievement among the ethnic groups. Muslims of the study area are poorer than the Hindu group. So, a tendency of dropping out from the formal education and to be engaged in various secondary pursuits like tailoring and wage labourer is more likely among the Muslims than the Hindus. This is also found that drop-out rate is higher for boys among the Muslims compared to that of the Hindus (Table 8), since the boys' ability to earn something fulfils the immediate objective of the Muslim parents.

Table 7: Percentage distribution of persons aged 5-24 years showing their present educational status (n=259)

Age Group (in yrs.)	Religious Group	Continuing			Dropped-out			Grand total
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
5-9	Muslim	8.11	6.95	15.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	15.06
	Hindu	3.47	3.47	6.95	0.39	0.00	0.39	7.34
10-14	Muslim	7.72	8.11	15.83	2.70	1.16	3.86	19.69
	Hindu	3.86	3.09	6.95	0.39	0.00	0.39	7.34
15-19	Muslim	1.93	6.56	8.49	5.41	3.86	9.27	17.76
	Hindu	3.47	3.09	6.56	1.16	1.16	2.32	8.88
20-24	Muslim	0.39	0.39	0.77	6.18	8.11	14.29	15.06
	Hindu	1.16	1.16	2.32	2.32	4.25	6.56	8.88
All age groups	Muslim	18.15	22.01	40.15	14.29	13.13	27.41	67.57
	Hindu	11.97	10.81	22.78	4.25	5.41	9.65	32.43
	Total	30.12	32.82	62.93	18.53	18.53	37.07	100.00

Reason	Muslim			Hindu		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Poverty	18 (25.35)	14 (19.72)	32 (45.07)	2 (08.00)	6 (24.00)	8 (32.00)
Family matter	3 (04.23)	1 (01.41)	4 (05.63)	-	3 (12.00)	3 (12.00)
Work/ Job	13 (18.31)	-	13 (18.31)	6 (24.00)	-	6 (24.00)
Early marriage	1 (01.41)	12 (16.90)	13 (18.31)	-	3 (12.00)	3 (12.00)
Not interested	2 (02.82)	7 (09.86)	9 (12.68)	2 (08.00)	3 (12.00)	5 (20.00)
All causes	37 (52.11)	34 (47.89)	71 (100.0)	10 (40.00)	15 (60.00)	25 (100.0)

There is a common practice of putting on *hijab* among the Muslim girls. About 66 per cent of them use *hijabs* and the rest do not use this (Table 9). The present study group does not show any significant association between use of hijab and drop-out.

Table 9: Distribution of the Muslim women with different Hijab practices at Panapukur

Category	Muslim women	
	No.	(%)
Borkha	36	22.93
Orna	67	42.68
Both	06	03.82
None in use	48	30.57
All categories	157	100.00

4. CONCLUSION:

The empirical findings of the study show that the Muslim group under study is lagging behind the Hindu group, though both the groups are living in the same village. About 39 per cent of the village population are illiterates, of which 25.71 per cent belong to the Muslims and 13.77 per cent to the Hindus. There are higher frequencies of Muslim students in the primary and junior high level of education compared to that of the Hindu children. But with the progress of educational level, their frequencies gradually come down in different educational levels. Principal cause for this is poverty. The Muslim parents are more interested in any kind of earning by their grown up children. Poverty, added with early marriage and involvement in wage labourer, results in higher frequency of drop outs among the Muslim children in comparison to the Hindu ones. Relatively lower family income coupled with larger family size with more number of children aged less than 20 years among the Muslim shows greater impoverishment risk for them. Only a few families are found to take advantage of educational opportunities accessible in and around the village under study. Similar phenomenon is also observed by Imtiaz Ahmad. For him, educational opportunities are likely to be exploited by a few sections of a community, who are oriented towards employment (Ahmad, 1981). Poor financial condition of the Muslims is also reflected in the NSSO data which find the lowest household monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) among the Muslims (NSSO, 2016). Basant and Shariff relate poverty with lack of educational opportunities which acts as stumbling block of the community when it comes to getting employment in urban sector (Basant and Shariff, 2010).

The present study shows that religious identity or minority complex does not have any bearing upon the educational under-achievement. Rather, there is an obvious secular trend of education among the Muslim group. The Muslim children are sent to the same educational institutions where those of the Hindus are

attending. Same curricula are followed by the students of both the religious groups. Relatively poorer economic condition along with its social consequences like early marriage and participation in wage labour of the grown-up children brings in more drop outs among the Muslims. Poor infrastructural facilities in the educational institutes in and around the study area are also adding up to the under-achievement in educational performance of the communities in question. It may be noted here that Rakesh Basant, a former member of the Sacher Committee, also observes that there are not many good schools in Muslim neighbourhood and that of many marginalized communities. For him, this is a problem in supply side and participation of Muslims in education goes up when this problem is addressed (Basant, 2019).

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